

# BIZARRE BEASTIES

*Come for the spider that fibs. Stay for the ape that cooks.*

## BEAUTIES ON THE QUACK WALK

**B**The Duck Fashion Show is exactly what it sounds like: Ducks wear fancy outfits, including little hats, and waddle up and down a catwalk to the delight of onlookers. Duck handler Brian Harrington has been dressing up his “Pied Piper Ducks” since the 1980s. He takes them to agricultural fairs throughout Australia, where the not-so-ugly ducklings show off the latest quack fashions—including “evening wear,” “bridal wear,” and “off to the races.” They’re always a big hit.

## FISH OUT OF WATER

Ginger the goldfish lives in a bowl on top of a cabinet in the home of Barbara and Alan Woodward. In late 2008, Barbara awoke to discover that Ginger had jumped out of his bowl and was lying on the floor behind the cabinet. The cabinet was too heavy for Barbara to move, she was late for work, and Alan wasn’t there. So she left. When Barbara returned 13 hours later, she expected to find a dead fish, but there was Ginger, flopping around in the middle of the floor. “It’s a Christmas miracle!” Barbara told reporters. (Biologists have been unable to explain how the fish survived for so long without water.) Ginger doesn’t swim as well as he used to, but there is now a cover over his bowl just to be safe.

## SHORT-ORDER COOK

Kanzi is a 31-year-old bonobo (a pygmy chimpanzee) who lives at the Great Ape Trust in Des Moines, Iowa. Under the tutelage of Dr. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, the primate can understand 3,000 words and “say” 500 words by pointing at symbols. But Kanzi’s most amazing ability is that he cooks his own food. It started when he was young. Said Savage-Rumbaugh, “Kanzi used to watch the film *Quest for Fire*...about early man struggling to control fire. He watched it spellbound over and over.” Then she taught the bonobo how to light a match. Now (with human supervision) Kanzi can pan-fry his own hamburgers and roast marshmallows on a stick.

## MY, WHAT A PRETTY EYE YOU HAVE

When the “Cyclops Shark” showed up on the Internet in 2011, most people dismissed it as a Photoshopped hoax. But it turns out that the picture is real. The dead fetal shark was removed from the belly of a pregnant female caught by an angler in the Gulf of California. Like an actual cyclops, it has one large eye located in the center of its face. The strange shark was sent to Mexican biologist Felipe Galván-Magaña, who confirmed that the lone eye had all its optic nerves, so had the animal been born, it most likely would have been able to see. However, it was too malformed to survive for long. Calling the find “extremely rare,” Galván-Magaña said such genetic mutations are not unheard of—there have been a few other documented cases of cyclops animals.

## MALE CHAUVINIST SPIDER

In 2011 scientists at Denmark’s Aarhus University observed a previously unknown behavior in nursery web spiders. The researchers already knew that males attract females by giving them a present of an insect carefully wrapped in silk. If the female accepts the gift, it’s mating time. But there’s a newly observed behavior that’s a bit more shocking: If the male can’t find a good bug to gift, it will instead use a small part of a plant and disguise it as a bug. To delay her from discovering his secret, the male spider winds the silk in such a complicated way that is very difficult for the female to unwrap it. Then, as she fruitlessly tries to open her gift, he takes the opportunity to mount her while she is distracted.

## WHERE THE SUN DON’T SHINE

“The key thing for fish living on coral reefs is to find somewhere to hide and not get eaten,” said Martin Attrill, a marine biologist from England’s Plymouth University. He’s talking about pearlfish, found along Australia’s Great Barrier Reef. They will take up residence in any “hole” they find suitable, even an oyster (hence the name). But the pearlfish’s preferred home is actually inside the butt of a sea cucumber (known as the “ocean’s slug”). “The pearlfish are essentially living in a burrow,” said Attrill. “They come out at night to feed from the sea cucumber’s colonic cavity. It is moist and safe in there, and quite often, the pearlfish live in there in pairs.”